

# Formal charges filed against suspect

T's JUN 21 1984

By Patrick J. Barnes  
and John Halladay  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporters

Formal charges were filed Wednesday in Vigo Superior Court Division 1 to seek the death penalty for Ralph R. Page, 39, accused of the fatal shooting Saturday of city police detective Harold L. Rogers.

Vigo Prosecutor Eric M. Abel said he also is preparing to file an additional charge requesting Page be designated a habitual offender.

Also shot during the fatal exchange of gunfire at the Wagon Wheel Tavern, 200 S. Third St., was Sandra Hammock, 23, Ralph Page's girlfriend.

Her body was found in a shallow

grave near Universal.

In another development, two guns, several bullets and other items of evidence obtained by police following the gunbattle will be delivered today to the Indiana State Police laboratory in Indianapolis.

Detective Chief Thomas Tanoos said laboratory experts will conduct ballistics analysis on the .38-caliber handgun fired by Rogers to determine if one of those bullets killed Hammock.

Rogers was killed by a single shot fired from a .44-caliber Magnum.

Police investigators said Page reportedly fired five shots at Rogers during the exchange of gunfire. Rogers reportedly fired five shots at Page.

Tanoos is asking that any person

*Crime + Criminals (and)*  
inside the tavern the night of the shooting who has not been contacted by police to telephone police headquarters.

"Right now, we're trying to reconstruct the crime and we need to talk with anyone who might have any information," Tanoos said.

Both Ralph Page and his 34-year-old brother, John, wore jail fatigues and had their hands cuffed behind their backs when they appeared in court under heavy guard. Ralph Page's legs were shackled.

Judge Michael H. Eldred entered preliminary pleas of innocent for both defendants.

Eldred appointed William G. Smock to defend Ralph Page.

If found guilty of the basic murder charge, Ralph Page could be

sentenced to up to 60 years in the custody of the Indiana Department of Correction.

Designation as a habitual offender would add 30 years to whatever other sentence Eldred might impose, making the maximum total sentence 90 years.

An individual is eligible for habitual-offender status after accumulating two or more unrelated felony convictions.

Abel said he understands Ralph Page has six felony convictions, and he said he hopes to receive certified copies of those convictions later this week.

If Ralph Page is convicted of Rogers' murder, there would be

additional proceedings before the same jury to determine if there were aggravating circumstances sufficient to impose the death penalty and if there were any mitigating circumstances that might work against the death penalty.

The request filed Wednesday to impose the death penalty on Ralph Page says Rogers was murdered while acting in the course of duty. Murder of a law-enforcement officer acting in the course of duty is one of the aggravating circumstances listed in Indiana's death-penalty law.

Eldred ordered Ralph Page to continue to be held without bond in the Vigo County Jail. A trial date will be set July 3.

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# Trials

T s APR 14 1985

## Page could face death penalty if convicted in officer's killing

By Patrick J. Barnes  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

Will Ralph Page, 39, pay the supreme price — electrocution — for the shooting death of Terre Haute police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers on June 16, 1984?

That question will be asked of jurors picked in Hendricks County and returned to Vigo County for Page's trial, expected to last two weeks.

Jury selection begins Monday in Danville, Ind., with Vigo County Superior Court Division 1 Judge Michael H. Eldred presiding. Once the jury is seated, it will be sequestered in Terre Haute.

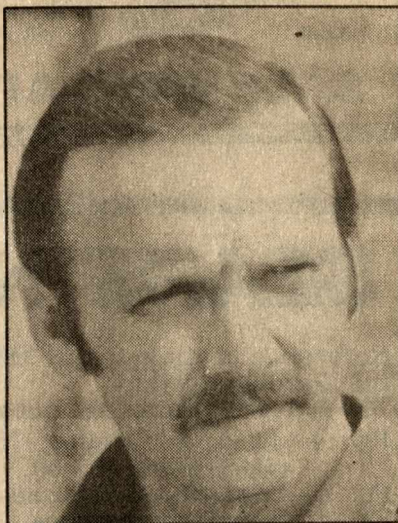
Vigo County Prosecutor Eric M. Abel is seeking the death penalty for Page along with two other charges — murder and habitual criminal.

One of the aggravating factors that may qualify a defendant for the death penalty is conviction of killing a police officer.

"I have no doubt that, at the time of the shooting, Sonny Rogers was on duty, since Terre Haute police officers are on duty 24 hours a day," Abel said when he requested the death penalty last year for Page.

Attorney William G. Smock was appointed to represent Page. This case is not the first death-penalty trial for Smock. Three years ago Smock represented mass murderer Donald Ray Wallace, who was convicted of the murders of four Evansville family members. Wallace, ordered to die in Indiana's electric chair, is presently on death row.

Court documents show that Page has four previous felony convictions — Jan. 17, 1980, conviction of



**RALPH PAGE**  
To be tried in Vigo County

aggravated battery in Madison County, Ill.; Feb. 15, 1973, conviction of voluntary manslaughter in Gallatin County, Ill.; Jan. 7, 1971, conviction of burglary in Madison County, Ill., and Sept. 23, 1969, conviction of aggravated battery in Madison County, Ill.

Also, court documents show that Page allegedly attempted to escape from the Vigo County Jail Oct. 9, 1984. On Oct. 12, Page was charged with attempted escape, a class D felony, after sheriff's department employees found several metal rods in Page's cellblock. They were reportedly used to remove a quantity of mortar between concrete blocks.

The escape charge is pending.

According to police, Rogers was killed inside a tavern where he was playing in a county-western band with his son, Marc, and others.

Rogers, off duty at the time, reportedly attempted to break up

an argument between Page, his girlfriend Sandra Vatile Hammock, and Page's sister-in-law, Rose Page.

Page, investigators said, reportedly tore off Rose Page's shirt before pulling a gun and firing it into the floor. Police said that when Page waved the gun Rogers identified himself as a policeman and ordered Page to stop.

At that point, investigators theorize that Page pointed the handgun at Rogers and both men began shooting at one another.

Rogers reportedly fired five shots, while Page shot six times, the last shot striking Rogers in the forehead.

During the exchange of gunfire, police said that Page used Hammock, 23, East Alton, Ill., as a body shield. Hammock was shot once in the face by Rogers.

Outside the tavern, police said, Page ordered his brother John Page, 34, to drive a car north to Universal. Inside the vehicle were the Page brothers, the wounded woman and Rose Page.

Acting on information from witnesses at the tavern, six hours after the shooting police went to a trailer in Universal occupied by John and Rose Page. Inside the trailer police found a .44-caliber Magnum handgun reportedly belonging to Ralph Page.

After extensive questioning John Page led police to Hammock's body, which had been buried in a shallow grave in the Old Soldiers' Cemetery near Universal.

Ralph Page was found by police sleeping in a nearby wooded area. He offered no resistance.

John Page was arrested and charged with assisting a criminal. His case is pending. Page and his wife will testify against Ralph Page.

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Community Affairs File

Page 1, Ralph



Crime & Criminals (W.U.)

# Prosecution's case

## Brother testifies against Page

1 s APR 20 1985

By Patrick J. Barnes  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

John Page, younger brother of accused murderer Ralph Page, told a Vigo County Superior Court jury Friday that "it was Ralph's idea" to bury a woman's body in a Vermillion County cemetery last June following a shootout inside Wagon Wheel Tavern, 200 S. Third St.

That gun battle ended in the deaths of Terre Haute police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers and Ralph Page's girlfriend, Sandra Vatile Hammock, 23.

"Whose idea was it to bury Sandy?" Prosecutor Eric M. Abel asked John Page.

"Ralph's."

"Did you help?"

"Yes."

John Page said his older brother decided to bury the dead girl and get rid of the evidence after they arrived at the younger Page's mobile home in Universal following

the shooting.

"We went to the cemetery about 3 or 4 a.m. Ralph got her out of the car, laid her on the grass and pulled off her pants and top. He dug a hole while I held a flashlight. He put her in the hole and covered her up," the younger Page told the jury.

After burying Hammock, the younger Page said he and his brother returned to the trailer, where Ralph changed his blood-stained clothing.

John Page said Ralph ordered him to "get everything that had blood on it."

"We drove back to the cemetery to get Sandy's pants and top that we left. Then we drove to a strip pit and threw whatever had blood on it into the pit, including the carpeting from the back floorboard of the car," John Page said.

Page said that after tossing the items into the strip pit, they started back for the trailer, but spotted several police cars at the mobile home.

"We drove down a lane and I told

Ralph that I hadn't done anything wrong and I was going home. Ralph got out of the car and ran into the woods," Page said.

Page said he backed out of the lane and drove home.

Within minutes after arriving at home, Page said that police ordered him to surrender.

"I first told the police I didn't know nothing about it, but then decided to cooperate," Page said.

The younger Page said he took police to the wooded area where Ralph had fled and later took investigators to the cemetery where Hammock had been buried. He also took police to the strip pit where the items had been dumped.

During cross examination by defense attorney James Boswell, Page said he initially told police that he, not Ralph, had driven the car from the tavern to Universal.

"I was scared — I didn't know what to do," Page said.

Page said Abel had agreed to dismiss a felony charge against him for aiding a criminal if he testified against his older brother.

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Page, Ralph

# Jury finds Page guilty of being habitual culprit

Ts APR 25 1985

By Patrick J. Barnes  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

Convicted murderer Ralph R. Page was found guilty of being a habitual offender Thursday by a Vigo County Superior Court jury, which took only 10 minutes to reach its decision.

Division 1 Judge Michael H. Eldred set May 29 as the sentencing date for Page, convicted Tuesday by the same jury of gunning down Terre Haute police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers, June 16, 1984, inside the Wagon Wheel Lounge, 200 S. Third St.

Jurors, brought to Terre Haute from Danville, Ind., to hear the murder, death-sentence and habitual-offender cases, were unable to reach a decision Wednesday night about recommending the death sentence. Eldred declared the jury deadlocked after nearly six hours of deliberations.

Eldred, under Indiana law, has the authority to order the execution of Page.

Conviction of a habitual offender carries a 30-year prison sentence, in addition to any sentence imposed by Eldred.

If Eldred decides to impose the death sentence, the 30-year habitual-offender prison sentence also will be given, since the death penalty could be overturned on appeal by the Indiana Supreme Court, a court source said.

The high court could reverse the death penalty and give Page a 60-year sentence on the murder con-

viction. If that occurs, the 30-year habitual-offender sentence will run consecutively and Page would not be eligible for parole for 45 years.

To convict Page of being a habitual offender, the state had to prove Page had at least two prior unrelated felony convictions.

Evidence showed Page had four felony convictions — voluntary manslaughter, two separate charges of aggravated battery and one charge of burglary.

Prosecutor Eric M. Abel, in comments to the jury, said, "Now you know the true Ralph Page, the five-time [convicted] felon."

"Ralph Page has used four different weapons against four different people. He has been successful in taking the lives of two people.

"Your slaughter, Ralph Page, stops today, and never again will you be able to ever use a weapon against a human being."

One of the two lawyers defending Page, James W. Boswell, told the jury, "Ralph Page has paid for his other crimes in Illinois."

After the jury was dismissed, Marcus and Barbara Rogers, son and daughter-in-law of the slain policeman, along with Rogers' fiancée, Jo Ellen Benson, thanked Abel.

Page declined to be interviewed, saying, "I can't talk."

At City Hall, Police Chief Gerald Loudermilk, said he was "pleased with the murder conviction."

As for the jury's failure to return a recommendation on the death penalty, Loudermilk said, "That's the system — we have to accept it."

Page 1 Ralph

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Page 1, Ralph

*Crime & Criminals (WV)*

# Page escapes state's Judge defends 90-year term

*1 s MAY 30 1985*

**By John Halladay**  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

Convicted murderer Ralph Page was spared Indiana's electric chair but got a maximum 90-year sentence Wednesday from Vigo Superior Court Division 1 Judge Michael H. Eldred.

Page, 40, was convicted April 23 of the June 16, 1984, shooting of Terre Haute Police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers, 48.

Rogers died during an exchange of gunfire with Page at Wagon Wheel Lounge, 200 S. Third St.

Jurors were unable to decide April 24 whether to recommend Page be executed and Eldred said he would make that decision.

By Indiana law, the final decision in a death-penalty case is up to the judge, no matter what a jury might recommend.

Jurors did, however, on April 25 find Page to be a habitual offender

because of four previous felony convictions.

By Indiana law, the penalty range for a person convicted of murder but not sentenced to death is 30 to 60 years.

Eldred on Wednesday gave Page a 60-year sentence, and added another 30 years for being a habitual offender.

Eldred said evidence did not show Page intended to kill a policeman, for which the death penalty can be imposed in Indiana, because Rogers was not in uniform or in a police setting at the time of the killing. Rogers was off duty and performing in a band at the Wagon Wheel when the melee that cost him his life began.

The judge also said, "I feel that Lieutenant Rogers acted honorably and commensurate with his excellent conduct as a police officer."

According to the habitual offender papers and testimony against Page, the former Alton, Ill., resident shot and killed his half-

uncle in Shawneetown in April 1972. Page originally was charged with murder, but he agreed to plead guilty to a reduced charge of voluntary manslaughter, documents stated.

On Sept. 16, 1968, in Alton, Page shot a man in the back of the head with a pistol. He entered a guilty plea to aggravated battery for that crime.

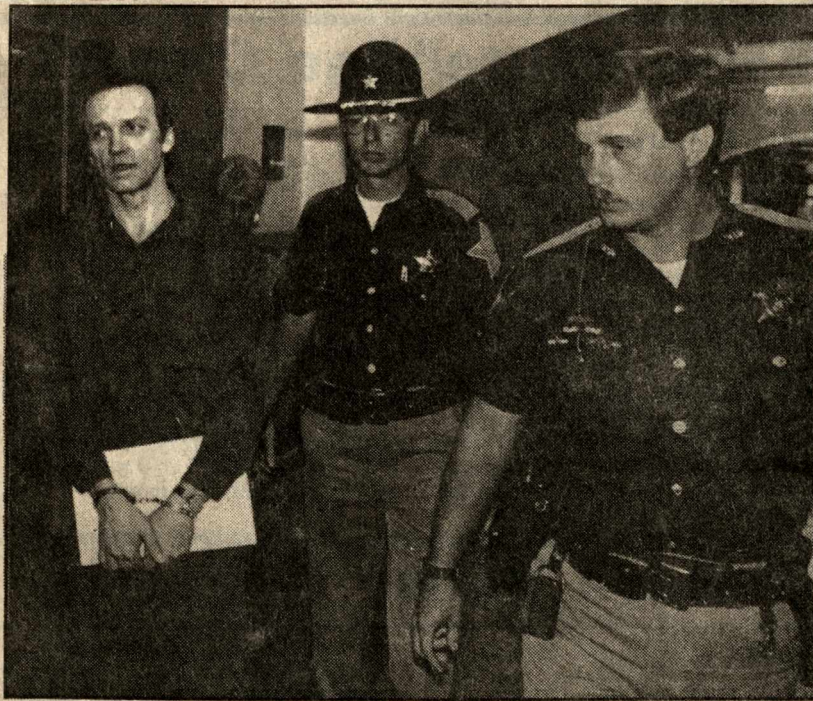
In January 1971, Page was convicted of an April 3, 1970, burglary in Alton.

And in January 1980, he pleaded guilty to another aggravated battery charge in connection with a May 30, 1979, stabbing.

Vigo County Prosecutor Eric M. Abel said Page also was convicted of an October 1968 armed robbery, although official certified records of that offense were not available at the time the habitual offender papers were filed.

Page said he plans to appeal his conviction and the 90-year sentence imposed Wednesday.

electric chair



Tribune-Star/Bob Poynter

**Back to jail:** Ralph Page leaves court under heavy guard.



Page, Ralph

# Judge denies Page's motion for new trial

SEP 6 1985

Crime & Criminals (WU)  
Community Affairs File  
By John Halladay  
Tribune-Star Staff Reporter

A judge has denied a motion that would have resulted in a new trial for convicted murderer Ralph Page. Page, 40, was found guilty April 23 of the June 16, 1984, shooting of Terre Haute Police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers, 48. Rogers died during an exchange of gunfire with Page in Wagon Wheel Lounge at 200 S. Third St. On May 29, Vigo Superior Court Division 1 Judge Michael H. Eldred sentenced Page to 60 years and added another 30 years because Page was found to be a habitual offender. If Page abides by state Department of Correction rules, he will be eligible for release in 2030. Page said following sentencing he planned to appeal his conviction.

The defense motion filed by attorneys James W. Boswell and William G. Smock said Eldred erred before testimony began by letting the prosecutor ask prospective jurors if they thought it would be reasonable for a police officer in plain clothes to shoot at a person firing a weapon inside a restaurant. "Thus, by questioning the prospective jurors in such a manner prior to them being selected, the prosecuting attorney was able to exclude any jurors that voiced any hesitancy or problem with the actions of the police officer at firing at an individual while in plain clothes." The defense attorneys said, "The evidence would also indicate that Harold Rogers was the first individual to fire a weapon at any human being in the bar" and that the jurors were not fully informed of the law of self-defense.

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

Page, Ralph

# High court denies Page's appeal

The Indiana Supreme Court has rejected the appeal of convicted killer Ralph Page.

Page, 40, was found guilty April 23, 1985, of the June 16, 1984, shooting of Terre Haute Police Detective Harold "Sonny" Rogers, 48.

Rogers died during an exchange of gunfire with Page in Wagon Wheel Lounge at 200 S. Third St. Ownership of the lounge has changed since the 1984 incident.

On May 29, 1985, Superior Court Division 1 Judge Michael H. Eldred sentenced Page to 60 years in the custody of the Indiana Department of Correction and added another 30 years because Page was found to be a habitual offender. If Page abides by Department of Correction rules, he will be eligible for release in 2030.

Terre Haute Police Chief Gerald Loudermilk, reacting to the ruling, said, "I think it's terrific."

He added that he would rather have had Page get the death penalty, but he was still pleased by the ruling.

"Maybe for a change we're winning," he said.

Page argued on appeal that he acted in self-defense and that he didn't know Rogers was a



**RALPH PAGE**  
Rejected unanimously

policeman.

The attorney general's office argued that Rogers identified himself and ordered Page to put down his weapon.

The high court upheld Page's conviction and sentence by a vote of 5-0.

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